

Shall We Walk Together or Walk Apart?
A Comment on the Windsor Report and the Future of the Anglican Communion

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I

The long awaited Windsor Report (WR) is now in the public domain. On one level, this address is a response to both the content and tone of the report. On a deeper level, however, it is a discussion of the future (or lack thereof) of the Anglican Communion itself. Reactions to the report have been varied. Some hold it to have gone too far and others not far enough. Still others have urged a slow and careful response. I count myself among the latter group, but I do so with a sense of urgency that is belied by the words “slow” and “careful.” To avoid an eventuality of this sort, (the muting of urgency by over caution and/or delay) I begin by citing WR’s disturbing conclusion. “There remains a very real danger that we will not choose to walk together. Should the call to halt and find ways of continuing in our present communion not be heeded, then we shall have to begin to learn to walk apart.” (WR #157)

It is the possibility that my church, perhaps along with the Anglican Church of Canada, will (by refusing to “call a halt”) make a *de facto* choice to “walk apart” that most deeply concerns me. It is this possibility that sets the direction of the remarks that follow. I confess that my own biography leads my thoughts and reactions to give greater weight to the health and continued existence of the Anglican Communion than to the particular internal exigencies of my own church. Ten years of service in the Church of Uganda made me aware of both of the ecumenical and international significance of the Anglican Communion and of the spiritual illness and theological poverty that now

characterize the life of my own church. Indeed, I have come to the reluctant conclusion that the most theologically adequate stance to take in the present crisis is one that begins with divine judgment upon ECUSA whose form and practice drifts ever further from a faithful witness to God's reconciling and redemptive action in Christ Jesus.

You must determine if my perception of the state of ECUSA before God might illumine as well that of the Anglican Church of Canada. However, no matter what your conclusion might be at the end of such a prophetic exercise, it is still the case that the future of Anglicanism as a communion of churches hangs in the balance; and that the way in which the scales tilt will be determined in no small measure by the reaction of the Primates and the Communion as a whole to the recommendations of this report. I say this for the simple reason that, though the report has both flaws and omissions (some serious), it nonetheless maps a credible way for the various autonomous churches of our communion to remain in fact a communion of churches

So my basic purpose in this address is to use WR to map a future for the churches of the Anglican Communion that will allow them to remain a communion. My goal reaches into the future, but that future depends in the first instance on successfully addressing, in the present, the crisis caused by the consecration of Gene Robinson, the action of the Diocese of New Westminster in the matter of blessing "gay" unions, the action of ECUSA's General Convention making room for such blessings, and the Action of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada that affirmed "the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships." (WR #27)

II

So let us begin with the theological starting point of WR and the (surprisingly) unanimous conclusions to which this theological framework leads its authors. On several occasions, the authors of the report remind their readers that it is not their brief to make determinations in respect to the theological and moral issues that swirl about the contested matter of same-gender sexual relations. Their brief is of an ecclesiological nature; namely to comment in particular on “the ways in which provinces of the Anglican Communion may relate to one another in situations where the ecclesiastical authorities of one province feel unable to maintain the fullness of communion with another part of the Anglican Communion.” (WR #1) Appropriately the authors of WR begin with an account of the “communion ecclesiology” that has shaped the recent ecumenical dialogues in which Anglicans have been involved. (See e.g., the various ARCIC reports). Further, in order to establish precedent, they have rendered an account of the ways in which Anglicans have functioned as a communion in years past.

The particular rendition of communion ecclesiology they give is rooted in a reading of Ephesians and the Corinthian correspondence. (WR # 1-6) WR rightly notes that, in these letters, God’s purpose in history is construed as nothing less than “to rescue the whole created order from all that defaces, corrupts and destroys it.” (WR #1) In accord with this purpose, it is God’s will that the church be “an anticipatory sign of God’s healing and restorative future for the world.” (WR #2) In respect to this calling, the *unity* of the church, the *communion* of its members, and the *holiness* to which each is called are each essential. (WR #3)

It is the view of the commission that the history of the Anglican Communion shows a sustained effort to live up to this calling. Thus they write:

Throughout its history, the Anglican Communion has been sustained by a common pattern of liturgical life rooted in the tradition of the Books of Common Prayer; shaped by the continual reading, both corporate and private, of the Holy Scriptures; rooted in its history through the See of Canterbury; and connected through a web of relationships—of bishops, consultative bodies, companion dioceses, projects of common mission, engagement with ecumenical partners—that are the means and the signs of common life. This continues to flourish in a myriad of ways at the local as well as national and international level. (WR #8)

In short, both Holy Scripture and the long history of Anglican practice point to the central importance of unity, communion, and holiness of life for Anglicans, each of which has been called into question by the recent actions of ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada. Though the Chair of the commission states in his introduction that WR “is not a judgment” but “part of a process,” (WR p. 11) the scriptural and historical foundations of WR lead, as the report unfolds, to rather strong and, to some, unexpected judgments. These judgments address the present crisis; and, in so doing, suggest certain definite courses of action that might serve in the present hour both to avoid further division and promote “unity, communion, and holiness of life.” Chief among the judgments are these:

- ECUSA, the Diocese of New Westminster, the Anglican Church of Canada, along with those who have crossed jurisdictional boundaries to aid parishes in distress have acted against the ideal of communion presented in the Pauline literature cited and in ways that are “incompatible” with the principles of communion interdependence implied by the biblical witness and adumbrated in WR (WR# 122)
- In acting as they have these churches and ecclesial bodies have clearly violated communion teaching as set forth in successive resolutions of the Lambeth Conference of Bishops and subsequently affirmed by the communion’s other instruments of unity. (WR #27).
- The actions of ECUSA, the Diocese of New Westminster, and the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada cannot be judged to be part of a process of “reception” for the simple reason that these actions are ones that “are explicitly against the current teaching of the Anglican Communion as a whole.” (WR #69)

- The actions of the Diocese of New Westminster and the General Convention of ECUSA that license or promote public blessing of same gender unions constitute “a denial of the bonds of communion.”
- The bishops of ECUSA, with full knowledge, consecrated a person bishop whose ministry as a “bishop in the Church of God”...very many people in the Anglican Communion” could “neither recognize nor receive.” As the authors of the report go on to say this action raises questions about their commitment to the Episcopal Church (USA)’s interdependence as a member of the Anglican Communion...” (WR # 129)
- The actions of ECUSA, the Diocese of New Westminster, and the Anglican Church of Canada have caused scandal within the Anglican Communion and placed severe stumbling blocks before the majority of its members. (WR #87-96)

In summary, it is the judgment of the members of the commission that ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada have (1) in various ways acted in a way contrary to the witness of Holy Scripture and to the principles of communion implied therein; (2) violated teaching affirmed by all the communion’s instruments of unity; (3) falsely claimed that their actions might be considered as part of a process of reception; (4) denied the bonds of communion that define Anglicanism; (5) in the case of ECUSA, consecrated a person bishop who cannot in fact exercise a central aspect of the Episcopal office; and (6) acted in ways that cause “scandal” throughout the Anglican Communion.

This simple rehearsal of “judgments” makes clear how seriously WR takes the crisis the Communion now faces. What then do they believe necessary as first steps toward mending the tear that has occurred? The list they provide is scattered about and easily missed, but when collected comprises what to my mind is extraordinarily strong prescription for cure. The remedies set forth in WR are all bracketed by “the imperatives of communion,” namely, “repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.” From the outset, (in my view rightly) no party to this dispute is exempted from these demands, each of which flows from the communion ecclesiology that lies at the base of the report. The report goes on to make clear what, in concrete terms, is demanded of those who are called

upon by the principles of communion to repent of their actions. In respect to the consecration of Gene Robinson the following invitations are offered.

- ECUSA (as a whole) is invited “to express its regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached” and “for the consequences which followed.” Such an expression of regret would, WR holds, “represent the desire of the Episcopal Church (USA) to remain within the Communion.” (WR #134)
- Those who took part in the consecration of Gene Robinson are invited (in order to create the space necessary for healing) to consider “whether they should withdraw themselves from representative functions within the Communion. (WR #134)
- ECUSA is invited “to effect a moratorium on the election and consent to the consecration” of anyone “living in a same gender union.” (WR #134)

In respect to approval of the blessing of same gender unions, WR notes, in surprisingly firm language, that liturgical provisions of this sort constitute “actions in breach of the legitimate application of the Christian faith as the churches of the Anglican Communion have received it, and of the bonds of affection in the life of the communion...” (WR #143) Consequently,

- WR calls upon the all bishops of the Anglican Communion not to authorize the blessing of same gender unions. (WR #143)
- The authors of the report also call for a moratorium in ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada upon all such public rites. (WR #144)
- The authors of the report also call upon all bishops in ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada who have authorized such rites “to express regret that the proper constraints of the bonds of affection were breached by such authorization.” (WR #144)

The points mentioned above are all directed to those who have violated the witness of Holy Scripture, the clear teaching of the Anglican Communion, and the principles of communion that bind its member churches together. They are steps that must be taken to avoid a decision “to walk apart” rather than “to walk together.” What, however, are the steps to be taken by those who have been scandalized by these actions? Here one touches upon one of the most controversial and, to my mind, least satisfactory aspects of the report. The report asks what care is to be given to dissenting groups within ECUSA and

the Anglican Church of Canada. Their response amounts to a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they recognize that the actions of bishops in both the U.S. and Canada have caused a breach of trust so serious that in some cases parish or diocese “has found itself unwilling to accept the ministry of a bishop associated with such a contrary action.” (WR #149) In response, bishops from elsewhere have been asked to provide pastoral and sacramental oversight. WR makes it “quite clear” that, though its authors believe the matter should have been handled differently, they nonetheless “fully understand the principled concerns that have led to those actions.” (WR #149) Thus, they express support for the proposals for delegated Episcopal oversight approved by ECUSA’s house of bishops in 2004 (WR #152), and they suggest that the Anglican Church of Canada adopt “a broadly similar scheme.” (WR #153) They even go so far as to say that the oversight they have in mind might, in principle, be provided by bishops from other provinces within the Communion. (WR #153)

One edge of the sword thus cuts against those who have precipitated the present crisis. The other, however, cuts against those who, in response to the crisis, have, in the view of the authors of the report, acted in a way contrary to an “ideal” of the Anglican Communion—one that holds that “all the Christians in one place should be united in their prayer, worship and the celebration of the sacraments.” Accordingly, they call upon bishops who, in conscience, have intervened in provinces other than their own

- To express regret fore the *consequences* (emphasis added) of their actions
- To affirm their desire to remain in the Communion, and
- To effect a moratorium on any further interventions.

III

These are the immediate steps the authors of WR believe necessary if the member churches of the Anglican Communion are, in the future, “to walk together” rather than “walk apart.” Forgive me for this rather lengthy rehearsal, but the very nature and tone of the report makes it easy to miss both the purpose and the force of what is being said. If the report is to be read properly, it is important I think to recognize what might be called its literary form. WR is a constitutional and juridical document rather than a prophetic one. As such, its language does not thunder forth like the words of Amos or Jeremiah. Rather, its contents are expressed in the careful and considered tones of a political, diplomatic, constitutional, or legal document. Its purpose is to strengthen a polity rather than denounce a great wrong or announce a new act of God. Precisely because its language is measured rather than graphic, it is easy to miss the fact that its indictment of ECUSA, the Diocese of New Westminster, and the Anglican Church of Canada is nothing less than devastating. Listen once more to the list of judgments unroll. These bodies have acted in ways incompatible with scripture and the principles of communion, they have contravened the clear teaching of the Anglican Communion, they have violated the bonds of communion, they have placed in Episcopal office a person who cannot fulfill the central function of that office, they have caused scandal throughout the Communion, and they have threatened the very existence of Anglicanism as a communion of Churches.

The devastating character of this indictment is heightened by the fact that the members, both liberal and conservative, of the commission, approved the contents of the report unanimously. Further, it is easy to miss the fact that the indictment was so stinging not, as the Presiding Bishop of ECUSA said, because the report is more interested in

containment than mission; but precisely because its authors believe that the preservation of the bonds of communion is central to the mission of the church. As section A of WR so clearly establishes, the mission of the church in fact depends upon its credibility as an effective sign of God's redemptive, reconciling, and uniting mission to the world. According to the communion ecclesiology of WR, the effectiveness of this sign is directly tied to unity, communion, and holiness of life within the body of Christ.

Finally, the literary form of WR has led to a serious misreading of one of the judgments it makes. Because the bishops who crossed jurisdictional boundaries were asked to express regret for the consequences of their actions and to effect a moratorium on any further actions of this sort, many have drawn what I believe to be a false conclusion; namely, that the report sees the action of those bishops who consecrated Gene Robinson and those who license the blessing of same gender unions as morally equivalent to those of bishops who cross jurisdictional boundaries in aid of distressed congregations and dioceses.

In response, let me say that I do not believe that WR's espousal of delegated Episcopal Oversight as approved by ECUSA's House of Bishops is in any way adequate to address the pastoral and ecclesial crisis set off by the actions of ECUSA and the Diocese of New Westminster. As I will indicate in a moment, I believe, because of the refusal of a number of bishops to abide by the spirit and the letter of DEPO, alternative Episcopal oversight with jurisdiction (AEO), though far less than ideal, is the only possible means left to address the needs of a number of congregations and dioceses in distress.

More of that in a moment! First, in response to the charge of moral equivalence, let it be noted that the devastating judgments rendered against ECUSA, the Dioceses of New Westminster, and the Anglican Church of Canada are not rendered against those bishops who have crossed jurisdictional boundaries. Rather, full recognition is given to the “principled concerns” that led to these actions. The objection of WR is not to the principles that led bishops to cross boundaries, but to the means they employed to address what WR fully recognizes as a genuine pastoral issue. Further the bishops who have crossed jurisdictional boundaries are not asked to express regret for their actions—only the (unspecified) consequences of their action. Finally, the call for a moratorium on these actions is bracketed by a call for bishops of ECUSA who have “refused to countenance the proposals set out by their House of Bishops to reconsider their stance.” In this respect, WR notes that those who do not countenance these proposals are “making a profoundly dismissive statement about their adherence to the polity of their own church.” (WR # 155)

Looking back over the report, I fail to see that the moral equivalence charge most recently brought by CAPA can be substantiated. It appears to me that WR speaks in relation to an ideal of communion—one in which all parties desire reconciliation and all parties practice restraint. What WR fails to state with sufficient strength is that when these principles are not abided by, the ideal of communion collapses and its normal procedures do not work. In short, AEO is not ideal. DEPO is ideal. But when the ideal is just not in play, less than desirable means to address a present crisis will inevitably be embraced.

IV

It is this last observation that brings me to what I take to be a glaring omission in WR—one that impinges (negatively) upon its adequacy as a means both of addressing the immediate crisis and the future health of the Communion as a whole. I speak of the failure of WR to discuss the relation between communion and discipline. It is true that WR makes one specific reference to discipline (WR #4), and that it mentions one concrete mode of discipline (the Authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury to issue or withhold invitations to gatherings of the communion and its instruments of unity); but no sustained discussion of the necessary connection between communion and discipline is to be found. This omission may in part be due to an inability on the part of the commission to reach agreement, in part because of a political judgment that such a discussion would not be helpful, and in part because its own view of communion is rather idealized. That is, in marked contrast to both Ephesians and Corinthians, it pays insufficient attention to the way in which the continued presence of sin in both world and church struggle against the unity it is God's purpose to bring about.

There is something like a premature eschatology present throughout this report that assumes the best of everyone; and while WR does indicate the way things ought to be, it does not give an adequate account of the way things are. Hence, perhaps, omission of a discussion of communion and discipline! Whatever the causes of this omission, it will not do if the promise of this report is to be realized. The actions of ECUSA have raised in an unavoidable way an issue that has been with us for well over a century. How, given both the legitimate differences between provinces and the likelihood of

illegitimate claims to independence, can Anglicanism remain a communion and yet support the autonomy of provinces that is such a characteristic mark of its polity?

I for one cannot imagine Anglicanism continuing as a communion if some agreement is not reached concerning the relation between the yoked realities of communion and discipline. Do not misunderstand me! I am not speaking of the articulation of a body of communion law that can be applied in cases like the one we are facing, as if an erring citizen had broken the traffic rules. As the Anglican Communion Institute argued in its submission to the Lambeth Commission, discipline is a necessary means of insuring that the life of the church is in fact formed by an accord with Holy Scripture. Consequently, the theologians of the institute argued in their submission Communion and Discipline (ACI, 2004) in the following manner.

Discipline is not primarily a legal reality. As the ordering force of the Body's life (ie. The Body of Christ) in witness before the world through its scriptural consonance, discipline represents very generally and freely the means by which the Church, at any given time, is 'formed' into this common life of faith. The word is not a juridical term, but a pedagogical one.

If it is indeed the case (as I have argued) that sin remains present within the life of the church, its unity, communion, and holiness of life will be maintained only if "pedagogical discipline" remains a part of its life while it awaits the consummation of God's unifying purpose at Christ's return. The question, of course, is what form that discipline might take? The question is a very difficult one to answer if indeed one wishes to avoid some form of juridical centralism like that of Rome—a step that most certainly would subvert Anglican polity by undermining autonomous character of the various Anglican provinces.

Despite its failure to discuss the place of discipline within a communion of churches, WR does indicate one way in which a pedagogical discipline might be exercised within our communion. After asserting its belief that the Archbishop of Canterbury is not simply a figurehead, but the “central focus of both unity and mission within the Communion” (WR #109) the commission expresses the opinion that the Archbishop “has the right to call or *not to call* (emphasis added) to meetings of the Lambeth Conference and the Primates Meeting “whomsoever he believes appropriate, in order to safeguard, and take counsel for, the well-being of the Anglican Communion.” They go on to note that the Archbishop should invite “on restricted terms at his sole discretion if circumstances exist where full voting membership of the Conference is perceived to be an undesirable status, or would militate against the greater unity of the Communion.” (WR #110)

In short, the long established authority of the Archbishop to “gather” the Communion and its Primates carries with it also the authority, if the unity of the Communion demands it, to refuse to gather those whose presence “militates against the greater unity of the Communion.” This form of discipline seems to me a remarkably effective pedagogical tool—one that is far preferable to premature announcements of broken or impaired communion. Once actions of this sort are taken and/or announced, brotherly correction becomes extraordinarily difficult. There already have been a number of announcements of this sort, and I pray that they will not precipitously lead to formal synodical actions. These forms of action, of course, lie within the authority of autonomous provinces, but taken precipitously and individually, they make premature

divisions, do not create spaces in time for instruction, rebuke, and repentance, and do not serve as effective means of pedagogy.

My own view is that these premature actions have been taken in large measure because the question of discipline has never been adequately addressed within our communion. Support of the commission's suggestions about the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury to "gather" or "not gather" would go a long way toward filling a potentially fatal flaw in the polity of the Anglican Communion. Unfortunately, this step may, in the present crisis, prove insufficient. A number of bishops from the more "progressive" dioceses both within ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada have, I am told, stated privately that attendance at the Lambeth Conference is not in their mind essential to the life of their Diocese or their Province. They do, however, become quite exercised when the matter of Delegated or Alternative Episcopal Oversight is mentioned. It is this issue that is the most immediate importance both to the bishop involved and to the distressed parishes under his or her jurisdiction.

I am inclined to believe that more needs to be said about this form of discipline than can be found in WR. If a break occurs in the pastoral relation between a bishop and one or more of the congregations under his care, and if this break has occurred because of actions by the bishop that run contrary to the witness of Holy Scripture and Anglican teaching, it would be optimal (as suggested by the 2004 resolution of ECUSA's house of bishops) for the bishop of the diocese to make arrangements for delegated Episcopal oversight (DEPO) of a sort that is acceptable to the distressed congregation. If, however, a bishop refuses to provide such oversight, what then is to be done? I do not believe it is enough to say, as have the authors of WR, that such a bishop would "be making a

profoundly dismissive statement about their adherence to the polity of their own church.”

After such a remark, one wants simply to say “well daaa...” No, something more is needed. My own view is that the Primates should, in cases where a bishop has acted in a manner judged by them to be contrary to scripture and the teaching of the Anglican Communion, deem it appropriate to have provided for the distressed parish or diocese a form of alternative Episcopal oversight with jurisdiction (AEO) that is acceptable both to them and the distressed parties involved. This arrangement should be considered temporary and in effect only as long as the offending bishop persists in his action.

WR may, in a limited sense, be right to say that such a form of discipline runs contrary to an ancient norm of the church; but the norm presupposes behavior on the part of a bishop that accords with catholic belief and practice. It cannot work in situation of blatant defiance of the agreed upon teaching of the church and the pastoral provisions made for coping with such circumstances. Further, the ancient canon of Nicea must be understood, at least in part, as an action *ex post facto*—one designed to put right a previously existing mess brought about by the divisive conflicts that preceded it. It seems to me that those who have sought to render pastoral assistance to dioceses and parishes in distress have not been fairly or adequately addressed. It would, I think, have been more helpful for the authors of the report to address the early statements about broken or impaired communion and set out a process whereby these measures might in the future be avoided.

V

This last remark brings me to the final section of this address. WR takes a very firm stand in respect to the immediate steps needed to effect repentance, forgiveness, and

reconciliation within our torn communion. In addition, however, in view of the fact that crises of the sort Anglicans now face most certainly will arise in the future, WR makes a number of extraordinarily wise and helpful statements about the long term steps necessary if communion between Anglican provinces is to be preserved and strengthened over the long haul.

It is not possible in this short address to discuss adequately all of these suggestions, but a few comments I believe will serve to make clear both their promise and their problems. First, WR rightly assumes (with one exception) that the basic elements of Anglican polity are in place; and that these elements are, if considered in themselves, adequate to meet the challenges that lie ahead. Thus, there is general approval of the “instruments of unity” now available to the Communion. (See i.e., Section C of WR, “Our Future Life Together”) The issue that must be addressed, according to the commission, is the nature of their authority and the relation between them. Thus, WR concludes, “...there needs to be a clearer understanding of the expectations placed on provinces in responding to the decisions of these Instruments.” (WR #105) They further conclude that the terminology used to describe the Instruments of Unity does not sufficiently reveal their unifying purpose. Consequently, WR recommends that the Archbishop of Canterbury “be regarded as the focus of *unity* and that the Primates’ Meeting, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and possibly others, be regarded more appropriately as the Instruments of *Communion*” (emphasis added). The report further suggests that, in order to make the role of the Primates’ Meeting clearer its name be changed to the Primates’ Conference—the Lambeth Standing Committee.

This terminological adjustment is but one suggestion of several meant to bring the responsibilities of the “Instruments of Communion” into sharper focus. Thus, the report contends also that the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury should be seen as pivotal in relation to each and all the Instruments of Communion. In this respect, it is the Archbishop of Canterbury who is to gather (or refuse to gather) the various instruments of the Communion. Further it is the Archbishop who is “to articulate the mind of the Communion, especially in areas of controversy.” (WR #109, #110) The Primates, gathered by the Archbishop of Canterbury, are to assume the “enhanced responsibility” for the unity and health of the Communion assigned them by the Lambeth Conference; and thus are to be seen as the Standing Committee of that Conference. The most far-reaching redefinition of responsibility applies to the Anglican Consultative Council. The report notes that at present “there is no clear demarcation indicating which responsibilities fall to which instrument of unity” and that “this is particularly true of relationship between the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Consultative Council.” (WR #105) Clearly, WR wants this matter sorted out and that right soon.

The Instruments of Communion are in place. They need only clarification in respect to authority and interrelationship. WR believes also, however, that they need to be supplemented in certain ways. In this respect, there are three suggestions of particular importance. The Archbishop of Canterbury should be provided with a council of advice, canon law should be considered an additional instrument of communion, and there should be a solemn covenant between the various provinces of the Communion that would “make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion.” (WR # 118)

Some final, though brief, comments are appropriate in respect to each of these suggestions. First, in respect to a council of advice for the Archbishop of Canterbury, he not doubt should have one. Surely, however, the Archbishop can constitute such a body on his own authority. It seems unwise to me to place this suggestion among others that have to do with the polity of the Anglican Communion. By doing so, one simply places another “instrument” in the mix—one that holds the potential of undermining the authority of the already established instruments.

Second, in respect to Canon Law, the report notes that in 2002 “the Primates recognized that the unwritten law common to the Churches of the Communion...may be understood to constitute a fifth ‘instrument of unity.’ (WR #114) Consequently, WR recommends a process wherein “The canon law of each church should reflect and promote global communion.” (WR #115) This suggestion is of enormous importance and should receive support; but no one in his or her right mind can imagine that compliance with this suggestion can be done very quickly. Indeed, it will not come about unless a covenant that makes explicit the bonds that tie the churches of the Communion is in place. Without espousal of the overriding importance of unity, communion, and holiness of life for the definition of the Anglican Communion, there will not be sufficient motivation within the communion as a whole to undertake such a daunting project.

Thus, a final word about WR’s suggestion of a covenant! I cannot possibly undertake an analysis of the covenant suggested. I can say, however, that its intent is to make clear that communion among Anglicans is utterly dependent upon the sort of mutual subjection that both Ephesians and Corinthians posit as essential to maintaining unity within the Body of Christ. It is my view that Anglicans have, over time, come to

posit mutual subjection in the Lord (rather than the three fold ministry) as the defining feature of their polity. Thus, I have argued elsewhere that Anglicans have answered the question of how the church both remains faithful to the Apostolic witness and addresses the exigencies of varying times and places by allowing wide ranging debate over contested issues but delaying changes in practice until there is a consensus among the faithful. The unity of the communion depends upon being mutually subject—a principle that brackets and limits the meaning of autonomy.

It is this essential element of Anglican polity that the actions of ECUSA, the Diocese of Westminster, and the Anglican Church of Canada have subverted by their recent actions. I am often tempted to wring my hands over what has been done, but a wiser voice in me says that these actions are forcing us to recognize in conscious fashion the sort of polity that has evolved among us—a polity of whose basic characteristics we are largely unconscious. If we had been aware of the nature of our polity, the current crisis would in all likelihood not have arisen. There would be no need of a covenant because we would have understood far better than we do at present the nature of our communion. The present crisis has demonstrated clearly that we do not understand ourselves very well. Thus, a conscious espousal of the nature of our communion is without question necessary. The proposed covenant no doubt needs review, but it is exactly what is needed if we are to come to the sort of self-understanding necessary for life in communion. So also is the solemn act of entering a covenant that carries the weight of an international obligation. (WR #119) Apart from such understanding and action, we will without doubt face other crises of perhaps even more devastating effect in the not too distant future. As WR rightly says, “The Anglican Communion cannot again

afford, in every sense, the crippling prospect of repeated worldwide inter-Anglican conflict such as that engendered by the current crisis.” (WR #119) These words may be taken as final words. To ignore them is to turn ones back on a communion whose life I firmly believe fits into God’s providence in a positive way, and I only hope that our current peevishness does not lead us in such a destructive path.